

THE DEPARTMENT OF CLASSICS, 1870-1970

(A survey written for the Centennial of the Ohio State University)

It was a firmly-established principle at the founding of the land-grant colleges that the Humanities should be taught alongside the "agricultural and mechanical sciences." The ancient languages and literatures had always held an important place in the structure of American higher education, even though criticism of such studies had been levelled against them as early as the seventeenth century. The founders of the Agricultural and Mechanical College in Ohio believed that the men who were to develop the rich lands of the Middle West should at least be exposed to less utilitarian studies. The Department of Modern and Ancient Languages was among the ten original departments at the founding of the University, and Professor W. G. Williams, of Ohio Wesleyan University, was elected to the Chair of Ancient Language and Literature. Professor Williams resigned from his post in 1873, at the urgent request of the trustees of Ohio Wesleyan University, and his place was taken by Professor J. H. Wright. Professor Williams' departure was deeply regretted by his colleagues who found in him "one of the most accomplished classical scholars in the country and a charming lecturer upon linguistic subjects." He was also unusual among his contemporaries in his taste for original research, and he had been attracted to the new university by the potentialities which he saw for developing research. Professor Wright was to become no less distinguished; he joined the faculty upon graduation from Dartmouth College, leaving

04228.2
5 D4

in 1876 to pursue a career which eventually took him to Johns Hopkins University as Professor of Classical Philology and to Harvard University as Professor of Greek and Dean of the Graduate School. He also became Secretary and, later, President of the American Philological Association.

Professor Wright was succeeded by Professor Josiah R. Smith, who remained at the University until 1881, when he left to study in Germany, returning in 1883 to hold the Chair of Greek in the newly reorganized department. His place in 1881 was taken by Professor Samuel C. Derby, formerly president of Antioch College, who became the dominating figure in the department's first fifty years. By 1883 the department was flourishing to such an extent that it was divided into two departments, of Latin and Greek respectively, with Professors Derby and Smith as holders of the two chairs. Even so, the demand for instruction in the Classics outran the resources of the departments, and former President Orton was called in to help Professor Derby in teaching Latin, while himself holding a Professorship of Geology. High enrollments were known even in the early days and a class in Latin of 54 was recorded in 1879.

Samuel Carroll Derby (1842-1921), a New Hampshire native and graduate of Harvard, was a man of outstanding ability and personality, whose influence extended far beyond the range of his own department and its studies. His long tenure of the professorship at Ohio State ensured the stability of the Classics and earned a respected and central position for his field within the structure

of the expanding university. He was Librarian from 1881-1892 and in 1896 was appointed the first Dean of the College of Arts. He saw the importance of the Classics in a modern education and outstripped many of his classical colleagues and successors in his breadth of vision. President Thompson said of him that "he was an ardent advocate of the central idea in the Land-Grant Colleges..... He could be enthusiastic about agriculture and the mechanic arts while passionately and profoundly a lover of the classics."

The two departments continued to grow and to attract a distinguished faculty; an outstanding appointment was that of George M. Bolling to the Chair of Greek in 1914. Dr. Bolling remained on the faculty until 1940, and attained an international reputation as a scholar in the fields of Linguistics and Homeric studies. In 1925 the two departments were combined to form the Department of Classical Languages and Literatures, a title which it kept until 1966. The first chairman of the new department was Professor Marbury B. Ogle and he was succeeded in 1931 by Professor John B. Titchener as acting chairman and later, in 1934, as chairman. Professor Titchener's appointment was made at a time when the Classics were under continuous attack from educators of the "life-adjustment" school and other disciples of John Dewey: his task therefore in the first part of his tenure of office was to maintain a program of high quality and show that the vision of Derby and his predecessors was not lost -- that the Ohio State University still needed strong humanistic disciplines at the heart of its academic program. He was successful in the task: the department expanded its graduate program (the first Ph.D. degree in Latin had been

awarded in 1927) while maintaining a strong undergraduate program, including courses on ancient literature in translation, an achievement that was the more remarkable if the limited resources in manpower available are considered. The usual faculty complement in this period was four professors, and teaching and research were equally emphasized. In its scholarship the department was strongly inclined towards philology and literary and textual criticism, being influenced by the philological tradition associated with W. A. Oldfather of the University of Illinois. The work of Professor Titchener himself, as editor of Plutarch's Moralia, and of Professor Kenneth Abbott, in Latin literature and lexicography, attained international recognition and complemented the established reputation of Professor Bolling. The department was strengthened in 1947 by the appointment of Professor Clarence Forbes, already distinguished as a scholar in the field of Greek literature and education, who brought new life to the non-specialist work of the department and broadened the undergraduate curriculum.

The department of Classics shared in the general revision of American higher education which began in the late 1950 's. Its faculty and graduate enrollment increased and a thorough revision of its whole program was inaugurated towards the end of Professor Titchener's tenure. He was succeeded in 1966 by Professor Charles Babcock, who joined Ohio State from the University of Pennsylvania. Professor Babcock undertook a thorough reorganization of the department's structure and programs; under him the graduate program expanded dramatically, and an extensive fellowship program was instituted. The new program was symbolized by the change in the

title of the department to the Department of Classics, a change which recognized the breadth of the range of classical studies. The enrollment of full-time graduate students has more than doubled in the last few years to its current level of 40, and the faculty now stands at 12 full-time professorial appointments.

Upon Professor Babcock's appointment to the first Deanship of the College of Humanities, Professor Mark Morford became chairman, and under him the revision of the program has continued. The department still bases its graduate and major programs upon the history and criticism of ancient literatures, but it has moved more decisively in the direction of the ancillary classical disciplines (such as epigraphy and papyrology) while taking part in cooperative ventures with other departments in archaeology and history. The first group of classical graduate students to take part in an archaeological campaign will be in England in 1970, under joint sponsorship with the University of Leeds, while a more extensive program in Yugoslavia in cooperation with the Division of History of Art is planned for the early 1970's. At the same time the department has taken note of the many changes in instructional techniques; one course will be given with computer-assisted instruction in 1970-71, and another is planned for 1971-2. The language laboratory and the Listening Center have long been used by classical teachers, as have the more usual visual aids: plans are currently under consideration for developing TV teaching in the humanities.

The dramatic expansion of the graduate program has been accompanied by a rise in the quality of new students, who, like

the faculty, are drawn from all over the country and from overseas. In spite of the emphasis upon graduate studies the department's other responsibilities have not been forgotten, and the original purpose of the department-- to provide a humanist core in a modern university -- is still the mainspring of its philosophy. The undergraduate survey courses in the ancient literatures and civilizations continue to be among the most popular on the campus, with an average section-size of more than 200 students. Such courses are a source of pride and of problems; while classicists recognize the basic need to spread the knowledge of their field to a wide and general audience, they also know that such courses can only be taught by well-trained faculty of wide scholarship. Thus the need remains, more strongly felt than ever, for a strong graduate program in the classics, here and elsewhere, to provide the firm grounding for future teachers. A university such as Ohio State has a unique opportunity to serve both aspects of the classicist's calling -- to encourage research and creative scholarship and to teach classical humanities to the non-classical student. This was the vision of Samuel Derby and it continued to be the essential mission of the department today.

Although the department is comparatively small, it has given more than its share in public service. In the university its members have always been prominent in regular advisory and administrative committees, while two of its members, Samuel Derby and Charles Babcock, have been Deans of their respective Colleges. In the community it has recognized its duty especially towards secondary education: a long association with the College of Education has assured a steady stream of well-trained Latin teachers in Ohio schools, while classical faculty have cooperated directly and

closely with school teachers. In the last few years a regular evening enrichment course has been offered for local school teachers: more significantly still, Professor Vincent Cleary, who was appointed in 1968, has been working with the schools and the College of Education to improve the secondary-school curriculum. Under his leadership the department sponsored an institute for 25 teachers in 1969, and will sponsor a second institute in 1970.

On the regional and national scene the department has also been prominent: Professor Bolling was a founder of the Linguistic Society of America and editor of its journal, Language, from 1925 until 1939. Professor W. Robert Jones was editor of the Classical Journal from 1961 until his tragically early death in 1968.

Professor Babcock is a director of the American Philological Association; Professor Forbes was President of the Classical Association of the Middle West and South in 1950. Many members of the department have served and are currently serving on national professional committees.

Thus the Department of Classics enters its second century full of vitality and with high expectations. The relevance of its work in a big state university is in no way diminished, and the scope of its teaching and research has expanded. The field of the Classics is undergoing many changes and there are many exciting new developments. The present department, with its young faculty and its substantial body of graduate students -- both groups drawn from all over the country and of the highest quality -- is in an excellent position to be among the leaders in these developments. While in many places the Classics are conducting a holding operation, at Ohio State they can look forward to further development and encouragement in the coming years.